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Senate passes graduation-requirement plan

LANSING — The Senate today approved legislation that puts Michigan at the forefront of efforts to create rigorous statewide high-school graduation requirements so young people leave school ready for the 21st century.

“Students in high school should graduate with higher standards like their peers in other states or around the world, and they also deserve the chance to pursue other opportunities such as vocational tech training,” said Sen. Patty Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township. “I am confident these bills will allow students the flexibility to do this, while ensuring they are prepared for either college or the job market.”

The legislation would require students to take four years, or equivalent credit, of English and math; three of science and social studies; and one year of an arts course as well as a health and physical-education course. Additionally, students would have to take biology, geometry and Algebra I and II, among other specific course requirements.

In one key difference from the House plan, senators backed a two-year foreign-language requirement that could be fulfilled anytime between kindergarten and graduation.

The Senate Education Committee logged almost 3,000 miles in travel to nine hearings across the state that included members of the committee and local lawmakers. At the hearings, legislators listened to more than 24 hours of testimony from more than 200 people.

After the state superintendent and State Board of Education proposed graduation requirements beyond the half year of civics class now required, state lawmakers immediately began giving the board’s proposal careful consideration.

Lawmakers now will begin working out the differences between the Senate and House versions.

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